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Letter dated 10 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Please find attached a press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on the issue relating to the situation in Abkhazia, George (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter were circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Vitaly I. **Churkin**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 10 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Russian Federation withdraws from regime of restrictions established in 1996 for Abkhazia

6 March 2008

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on 6 March 2008, sent an official note to the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States announcing that the Russian Federation, by reason of a change in the circumstances, no longer considers itself bound by the provisions of the Decision of the CIS Council of Heads of State on measures to settle the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, of 19 January 1996. That decision had from the said date established a ban on trade, economic, financial, transport and other ties with Abkhazia at a State level.

As is known, the decision was taken in 1996 against the background of the sharp confrontation between the parties in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict that had continued after the bloody war of 1992-1993. At the time, its purpose was to induce Abkhazia to take a more flexible position, primarily on the issue of the return of refugees and temporarily displaced persons.

Today, the situation has cardinally changed. There have returned to Abkhazia's Gali District most of the refugees of Georgian nationality that lived there previously. Further progress of this process is being impeded by Georgia's rejection of the system for their registration that was proposed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

As to participation in the conflict settlement process, the Abkhaz side has been fulfilling its obligations under the major agreements in this field. It is prepared to take practical steps towards strengthening trust and security in the conflict zone. Against this background the Georgian side does not display a similar constructive approach to implementing the previously reached agreements. Moreover, it actually undermines the negotiation process, having placed in the upper part of the Kodori Gorge of Abkhazia an administrative structure accountable to Tbilisi.

Against this background, maintaining the bans established by the said decision has fully lost its meaning; it is hindering the implementation of economic and social programmes in the region and is causing unjustified hardship for the people of Abkhazia.

The lifting of sanctions against Abkhazia is along the general lines of the long-established principle in international practice of gradual softening and abolition of coercive measures in the case of their targets' compliance with the appropriate requirements of the international community. The United Nations Secretary-General's Group of Friends for Georgia also came out in favour of this attitude and its recommendations were supported by the United Nations Security Council.

The note of the Russian Foreign Ministry contains a proposal that Commonwealth member States should take analogous steps and withdraw from the regime of restrictions against Abkhazia, established in 1996.